

Labor's Position in Peace or War.

[Below will be found the complete declaration adopted by the labor conference held at Washington, March 12, in relation to labor's policy in peace or war. The nature of this declaration makes it a document of national and historical importance at the present time.—Ed.]

Washington, D. C., March 12, 1917.

A conference of the representatives of the national and international trade unions of America, called by the executive council of the American Federation of Labor, was held in the American Federation of Labor Building, March 12, 1917, in which conference the representatives of affiliated national and international trade unions and the railroad brotherhoods participated.

The executive council of the American Federation of Labor had the subject-matter for three days under advisement prior to the conference and submitted a declaration to the conference. The entire day was given over to a discussion of the recommendation and such suggestions as were submitted. After a thorough discussion the following document was adopted by a unanimous vote:

We speak for millions of Americans. We are not a sect. We are not a party. We represent the organizations held together by the pressure of our common needs. We represent the part of the nation closest to the fundamentals of life. Those we represent wield the nation's tools and grapple with the forces that are brought under control in our material civilization. The power and use of industrial tools is greater than the tools of war and will in time supersede agencies of destruction.

A world war is on. The time has not yet come when war has been abolished.

Whether we approve it or not, we must recognize that war is a situation with which we must reckon. The present European war, involving as it does the majority of civilized nations and affecting the industry and commerce of the whole world, threatens at any moment to draw all countries, including our own, into the conflict. Our immediate problem, then, is to bring to bear upon war conditions instructive forethought, vision, principles of human welfare and conservation that should direct our course in every eventuality of life. The way to avert war is to establish constructive agencies for justice in times of peace and thus control for peace situations and forces that might otherwise result in war.

The methods of modern warfare, its new tactics, its vast organization, both military and industrial, present problems vastly different from those of previous wars. But the nation's problems afford an opportunity for the establishment of new freedom and wider opportunities for all the people. Modern warfare includes contests between workshops, factories, the land, financial and transportation resources of the countries involved; and necessarily applies to the relations between employers and employes, and as our own country now faces an impending peril, it is fitting that the masses of the people of the United States should take counsel and determine what course they shall pursue should a crisis arise necessitating the protection of our republic and defense of the ideals for which it stands:

In the struggle between the forces of democracy and special privilege, for just and historic reasons the masses of the people necessarily represent the ideals and the institutions of democracy. There is in organized society one potential organization whose purpose is to further these ideals and institutions—the organized labor movement.

In no previous war has the organized labor movement taken a directing part.

Labor has now reached an understanding of its rights, of its power and resources, of its value and contributions to society, and must make definite constructive proposals.

It is timely that we frankly present experiences and conditions which in former times have prevented nations from benefiting by the voluntary, whole-hearted co-operation of wage-earners in war time, and then make sugges-

tions how these hindrances to our national strength and vigor can be removed.

War has never put a stop to the necessity for struggle to establish and maintain industrial rights. Wage-earners in war times must, as has been said, keep one eye on the exploiters at home and the other upon the enemy threatening the national government. Such exploitation made it impossible for a warring nation to mobilize effectively its full strength for outward defense.

We maintain that it is the fundamental step in preparedness for the nation to set its own house in order and to establish at home justice in relations between men. Previous wars, for whatever purpose waged, developed new opportunities for exploiting wage-earners. Not only was there failure to recognize the necessity for protecting rights of workers that they might give that whole-hearted service to the country that can come only when every citizen enjoys rights, freedom and opportunity, but under guise of national necessity, labor was stripped of its means of defense against enemies at home and was robbed of the advantages, the protections, the guarantees of justice that had been achieved after ages of struggle. For these reasons workers have felt that no matter what the result of war, as wage-earners they generally lost.

In previous times labor had no representatives in the councils authorized to deal with the conduct of war. The rights, interests and welfare of workers were autocratically sacrificed for the slogan of "national safety."

The European war has demonstrated the dependence of the governments upon the co-operation of the masses of the people. Since the masses perform indispensable service, it follows that they should have a voice in determining the conditions upon which they give service.

The workers of America make known their beliefs, their demands and their purposes through a voluntary agency which they have established—the organized labor movement. This agency is not only the representative of those who directly constitute it, but it is the representative of all those persons who have common problems and purposes but who have not yet organized for their achievement.

Whether in peace or in war the organized labor movement seeks to make all else subordinate to human welfare and human opportunity. The labor movement stands as the defender of this principle and undertakes to protect the wealth-producers against the exorbitant greed of special interests, against profiteering, against exploitation, against the detestable methods of irresponsible greed, against the inhumanity and crime of heartless corporations and employers.

Labor demands the right in war times to be the recognized defender of wage-earners against the same forces which in former wars have made national necessity an excuse for more ruthless methods.

As the representatives of the wage-earners we assert that conditions of work and pay in government employment and in all occupations should conform to principles of human welfare and justice.

A nation can not make an effective defense against an outside danger if groups of citizens are asked to take part in a war though smarting with a sense of keen injustice inflicted by the government they are expected to and will defend.

The cornerstone of national defense is justice in fundamental relations of life—economic justice.

The one agency which accomplishes this for the workers is the organized labor movement. The greatest step that can be made for national defense is not to bind and throttle the organized labor movement but to afford its greatest scope and opportunity for voluntary effective co-operation in spirit and in action.

During the long period in which it has been establishing itself, the labor movement has become a dynamic force in organizing the human side of industry and commerce. It is a great social factor, which must be recognized in all plans which affect wage-earners.

Whether planning for peace or war the government must recognize the organized labor movement as the agency through which it must co-operate with wage-earners.

Industrial justice is the right of those living within our country. With this right there is associated obligation. In war time obligation takes the form of service in defense of the republic against enemies.

We recognize that this service may be either military or industrial, both equally essential for national defense. We hold this to be incontrovertible that the government which demands that men and women give their labor power, their bodies or their lives to its service should also demand the service, in the interest of these human beings, of all wealth and the products of human toil—property.

We hold that if workers may be asked in time of national peril or emergency to give more exhausting service than the principles of human welfare warrant, that service should be asked only when accompanied by increased guarantees and safeguards, and when the profits which the employer shall secure from the industry in which they are engaged have been limited to fixed percentages.

We declare that such determination of profits should be based on costs of processes actually needed for product.

Workers have no delusions regarding the policy which property owners and exploiting employers pursue in peace or in war and they also recognize, that wrapped up with the safety of this republic are ideals of democracy, a heritage which the masses of the people received from our forefathers, who fought that liberty might live in this country—a heritage that is to be maintained and handed down to each generation with undiminished power and usefulness.

The labor movement recognizes the value of freedom and it knows that freedom and rights can be maintained only by those willing to assert their claims and to defend their rights. The American labor movement has always opposed unnecessary conflicts and all wars for aggrandizement, exploitation and enslavement, and yet it has done its part in the world's revolutions, in the struggles to establish greater freedom, democratic institutions and ideals of human justice.

Our labor movement distrusts and protests against militarism, because it knows that militarism represents privilege and is the tool of special interests, exploiters and despots. But while it opposes militarism, it holds that it is the duty of a nation to defend itself against injustice and invasion.

The menace of militarism arises through isolating the defensive functions of the state from civic activities and from creating military agencies out of touch with the masses of the people. Isolation is subversive to democracy—it harbors and nurtures the germs of arbitrary power.

The labor movement demands that a clear differentiation be made against military service for the nation and police duty, and that military service should be carefully distinguished from service in industrial disputes.

We hold that industrial service shall be deemed equally meritorious as military service. Organization for industrial and commercial service is upon a different basis from military service—the civic ideals still dominate. This should be recognized in mobilizing for this purpose. The same voluntary institutions that organized industrial commercial and transportation workers in times of peace will best take care of the same problems in time of war.

It is fundamental, therefore, that the government co-operate with the American organized labor movement for this purpose. Service in government factories and private establishments, in transportation agencies, all should conform to trade union standards.

The guarantees of human conservation should be recognized in war as well as in peace. Wherever changes in the organization of industry are necessary upon a war basis, they should be made in accord with plans agreed upon by representatives of the government and those engaged and employed in the industry. We recognize that in war, in certain employments requiring high skill, it is necessary to retain in industrial service the workers specially fitted therefor. In any eventuality when women may